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“Spiritual Family”
Ruth 1:1-18

- Jesus’ life as a **triangle**? There are three dimensions

up: which is his relationship with the father that he shows us,
in: in his relationship with his disciples,
out: in his ministry to the masses.

- **IN** dimension. With Jesus, this took place with the people he called into his inner circle—we know them as **disciples** or **apostles**.

-**learners (Disciple means learner)** -soaking in and imitating the way of Jesus.

-the scriptures remind us over and over again that we are not the ones who control the gates of the Kingdom

-We are called to be people who point to God’s *Surprising Grace*.

-**The dominant secular voice of our day says:** “screw the church! You do your thing” and for many people that means they just relate to God in “their own way.”

-Jesus gives us a different picture. **The Ministry of Jesus shows us that God insists that all of us broken messed up weird people belong in his family** - Jesus tells us parables like the parable of the lost son, to teach all of us who are like the last son that we *actually belong* in God's family in the church - there really is a place for us.

- Jesus also tells this parable to teach those of us older brother types that we do not control who is part of the family but we must learn to love those rascally little brothers.

-People who may look at a local church and say “that's not a place for me” - are challenged by the Book of Ruth because God says in it: “my family, the church, has a place for you.”

-But it also challenges those within the church and the faith already because God says in this story but he can call in whomever he wants into his Kingdom.

A little background:

-Judges: this story takes place after the exodus, after Moses has died, after Joshua has led Israel in conquest through the promised land.

-The Judges have risen up, Israel has been in a cycle of rebelling and returning to God.

- Judges is like the motion of a flushing toilet... Things just keep spinning in the same downward cycle.

-Ruth's story is set likely toward the end of this downward cycle,

-Elimelech led his family out of Israel into Moab... the tough decision to leave his home, to leave the promised land, to go to a foreign land with foreign Gods... All because he wants to save his family from starvation.

We may wonder: Should they have done it?

-Elimelech goes... And things keep getting worse... but again, scripture never says that this was punishment.

The story is not about explaining why bad things happened, the story is about the new act of redemption that God is doing in a difficult circumstances—in a broken world.

But in our lives, just like in Naomi and Ruth's lives, the meaning of the joy and suffering ALWAYS points toward Christ and his ultimate redemptive work.

Vv.7-18

- the foundational difference between Orpah, the daughter in law that departs, and Ruth, the daughter in law that stays with Naomi.

-At first both daughters in-law decline: they don't want to go back... Naomi presses them - she cannot offer even a hope of a good life if they come with her to Israel. Orpah weighs this out and turns back.

In verse 15 Naomi says of her “see your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods.”

Here's the crux of the matter: we're all like Orpah and Ruth - We must choose between eternal life, or temporary comfort. And remember, the temporary comfort isn't guaranteed.

v.17 - Ruth recognizes what is at stake goes far beyond food or housing security. Ruth is willing to risk the basics that she depends on because she's realised that the God of these Israelites means more than all the earthly security she could hope for.

Ruth **encountered God**. Encountering God changes everything – it can overcome every objection we can come up with:

-this is not your land

-this is not your home

-these are not your people

-this is not your God

-God loves breaking cultural taboos.

God **radically** welcomes in people: in ***the days of Israel*** we get foretastes like this— then in the ***days of Jesus*** the dividing wall is completely torn down and people from every nation and tribe and tongue every social strata, every condition of mental and physical frailty, kings and peasants, homeless and wealthy, are all welcomed into the Kingdom (not by birth or honour or works, but by FAITH)

The gateway into the Kingdom is John 10:9: **I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. (NIV).**

We find out Jesus himself is the gate. He's always been the gate.

- *in Christ*, God's mystery is made known: Grace is the key that unlocks the kingdom for all people. "The Law came through Moses (Ruth was *out*), But grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." And we see hints of Christ all through the Old Testament if our eyes are open. Just like here in the book of Ruth.

Ask yourself today – am I a “Naomi” to somebody?

Has God put someone in my life close to me that I have the opportunity to become a “spiritual parent” to?

Naomi must have reflected God’s heart to Ruth. God broke into Ruth’s life in some way through her relationship to Naomi.

If you have a “Ruth” in your life – someone you can spiritually parent – remember – it’s not about what YOU can do, it’s about what God can do through you.

If you are in Ruth’s shoes right now... in a season of searching, let me encourage you in two ways:

1. Though you may not see God at work in the circumstances around you, he is there, he has not left you, so pray – call out to him, HE can break through any time, any place.
2. Find a Naomi, a person who you can walk with, a person near you that you can see, talk to, even “cling to” just like Ruth does. We all need spiritual parents, people who are older and wiser in the faith.

If you are feeling on the margins of life in the church – **remember, God wants you here.** You may feel like Ruth in this first part of the story, caught between two worlds, but you have heard God’s voice – **don’t forget the sound of his voice, speaking to you grace and truth as Jesus walks with you.**